

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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MR. SCARBOROUGH'S FAMILY.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XXXIX. HOW THE LETTERS WERE RECEIVED.

WE must now describe the feelings of Mr. Scarborough's correspondents as they received his letters. When Mr. Grey began to read that which was addressed to him, he declared that on no consideration would he go down to Tretton. But when he came to enquire within himself as to his objection, he found that it lay chiefly in his great dislike to Augustus Scarborough. For poor Mountjoy, as he called him, he entertained a feeling of deep pity,—and pity we know is akin to love. And for the squire, he in his heart felt but little of that profound dislike which he was aware such conduct as the squire's ought to have generated. "He is the greatest rascal that I ever knew," he said again and again, both to Dolly and to Mr. Barry. But yet he did not regard him as an honest man regards a rascal, and was angry with himself in consequence. He knew that there remained with him even some spark of love for Mr. Scarborough, which to himself was inexplicable. From the moment in which he had first admitted the fact that Augustus Scarborough was the true heir-at-law, he had been most determined in taking care that that heirship should be established. It must be known to all men that Mountjoy was not the eldest son of his father, as the law required him to be for the inheritance of the property, and that Augustus was the eldest son; but in arranging that these truths should be notorious, it had come to pass that he had learnt to hate Augustus with an intensity that had redounded to the advantage both of Mountjoy and their

father. It must be so. Augustus must become Augustus Scarborough Esquire of Tretton,—but the worse luck for Tretton and all connected with it. And Mr. Grey did resolve that, when that day should come, all relation between himself and Tretton should cease.

It had never occurred to him that by redeeming the post-obit bonds, Mountjoy would become capable of owning and enjoying any property that might be left to him. With Tretton, all the belongings of Tretton, in the old-fashioned way, would of course go to the heir. The belongings of Tretton, which were personal property, would in themselves amount to wealth for a younger son. That which Mr. Scarborough would in this way be able to bequeath, might probably be worth thirty thousand pounds. Out of the proceeds of the real property the debts had been paid. And because Augustus had consented so to pay them, he was now to be mulcted of those loose belongings which gave its charm to Tretton! Because Augustus had paid Mountjoy's debts, Mountjoy was to be enabled to rob Augustus! There was a wickedness in this redolent of the old squire. But it was a wickedness in arranging which Mr. Grey hesitated to participate. As he thought of it, however, he could not but feel what a very clever man he had for a client.

"It will all go to the gambling-table, of course," he said that night to Dolly.

"It is no affair of ours."

"No. But when a lawyer is consulted, he has to think of the prudent or imprudent disposition of property."

"Mr. Scarborough hasn't consulted you, papa."

"I must look at it as though he had. He tells me what he intends to do, and I am bound to give him my advice. I

cannot advise him to bestow all these things on Augustus, whom I regard as a long way the worst of the family."

"You need not care about that."

"And here again," continued Mr. Grey, "comes up the question;—what is it that duty demands? Augustus is the eldest son, and is entitled to what the law allots him; but Mountjoy was brought up as the eldest son, and is certainly entitled to what provision the father can make him."

"You cannot provide for such a gambler."

"I don't know that that comes within my duty. It is not my fault that Mountjoy is a gambler, any more than that it is my fault that Augustus is a beast. Gambler and beast, there they are. And moreover nothing will turn the squire from his purpose. I am only a tool in his hands—a trowel for the laying of his mortar and bricks. Of course I must draw his will, and shall do it with some pleasure, because it will dispossess Augustus."

Then Mr. Grey went to bed, as did also Dolly; but she was not at all surprised at being summoned to his couch after she had been an hour in her own bed.

"I think I shall go down to Tretton," said Mr. Grey.

"You declared that you would never go there again."

"So I did; but I did not know then how much I might come to hate Augustus Scarborough."

"Would you go to Tretton merely to injure him?" said his daughter.

"I have been thinking about that," said Mr. Grey. "I don't know that I would go simply to do him an injury; but I think that I would go to see that justice is properly done."

"That can be arranged without your going to Tretton."

"By putting our heads together, I think we can contrive that the deed shall be more effectually performed. What we must attempt to do is to save this property from going to the gambling-table. There is only one way that occurs to me."

"What is that?"

"It must be left to his wife."

"He hasn't a wife."

"It must be left to some woman whom he will consent to marry. There are three objects;—to keep it from Augustus; to give the enjoyment of it to Mountjoy; and to prevent Mountjoy from gambling with it. The only thing I can see is a wife."

"There is a girl he wants to marry," said Dolly.

"But she doesn't want to marry him, and I doubt whether he can be got to marry any one else. There is still a peck of difficulties."

"Oh, papa, I wish you would wash your hands of the Scarboroughs."

"I must go to Tretton first," said he; "and now, my dear, you are doing no good by sitting up here and talking to me." Then, with a smile, Dolly took herself off to her own chamber.

Mountjoy, when he got his letter, was sitting over a late breakfast in Victoria Street. It was near twelve o'clock, and he was enjoying the delicious luxury of having his breakfast to eat, with a cigar after it, and nothing else that he need do. But the fruition of all these comforts was somewhat marred by the knowledge that he had no such dinner to expect. He must go out and look for a dinner among the eating-houses. The next morning would bring him no breakfast, and if he were to remain longer in Victoria Street he must do so in direct opposition to the owner of the establishment. He had that morning received notice to quit, and had been told that the following breakfast would be the last meal served to him. "Let it be good of its kind," Mountjoy had said.

"I believe you care for nothing but eating and drinking."

"There's little else that you can do for me." And so they had parted.

Mountjoy had taken the precaution of having his letters addressed to the house of the friendly bootmaker; and now, as he was slowly pouring out his first cup of coffee, and thinking how nearly it must be his last, his father's letter was brought to him. The letter had been delayed one day, as he himself had omitted to call for it. It was necessarily a sad time for him. He was a man who fought hard against melancholy, taking it as a primary rule of life, that, for such a one as he had become, the pleasures of the immediate moment should suffice. If one day, or, better still, one night of excitement was in store for him, the next day should be regarded as the unlimited future, for which no man can be responsible. But such philosophy will too frequently be insufficient for the stoutest hearts. Mountjoy's heart would occasionally almost give way, and then his thoughts would be dreary enough. Hunger, absolute hunger, without the assured

expectation of food, had never yet come upon him; but in order to put a stop to its cravings, if he should find it troublesome to bear, he had already provided himself with pistol and bullets.

And now, with his cup of coffee before him, aromatic, creamy, and hot, with a filleted sole rolled up before him on a little dish, three or four plover's eggs, on which to finish, lying by, and, on the distance of the table, a chasse of brandy, of which he already well knew the virtues, he got his father's letter. He did not at first open it, disliking all thoughts as to his father. Then gradually he tore the envelope, and was slow in understanding the full meaning of the last lines. He did not at once perceive the irony of "his brother's kindly interference," and of the "generosity" which had enabled him, Mountjoy, to be a recipient of property. But his father purposed to do something for his benefit. Gradually it dawned upon him that his father could only do that something effectually, because of his brother's dealings with the creditors.

Then the chairs and tables, and the gem or two, and the odd volumes, one by one, made themselves intelligible. That a father should write so to one son, and should so write of another, was marvellous. But then his father was a marvellous man, whose character he was only beginning to understand. His father, he told himself, had fortunately taken it into his head to hate Augustus, and intended, in consequence, to strip Tretton and the property generally of all their outside personal belongings.

Yes;—he thought that, with such an object before him, he would certainly go and see Mr. Grey. And if Mr. Grey should so advise him he would go down to Tretton. On such business as this he would consent to see his father. He did not think that just at present he need have recourse to his pistol for his devices. He could not on the very day go to Tretton, as it would be necessary that he should write to his father first. His brother would probably extend his hospitality for a couple of days when he should hear of the proposed journey, and, if not, would lend him money for his present purposes, or under existing circumstances he might probably be able to borrow it from Mr. Grey. With a heart elevated to almost absolute bliss he ate his breakfast, and drank his chasse, and smoked his cigar, and then rose slowly that he might

proceed to Mr. Grey's chambers. But at this moment Augustus came in. He had only breakfasted at his own club, much less comfortably than he would have done at home, in order that he might not sit at table with his brother. He had now returned so that he might see to Mountjoy's departure. "After all, Augustus, I am going down to Tretton," said the elder brother as he folded up his father's letter.

"What arguments has the old man used now?" Mountjoy did not think it well to tell his brother the exact nature of the arguments used, and therefore put the letter into his pocket.

"He wishes to say something to me about property," said Mountjoy.

Then some idea of the old squire's scheme fell with a crushing weight of anticipated sorrow on Augustus. In a moment it all occurred to him, what his father might do, what injuries he might inflict; and,—saddest of all feelings,—there came the immediate reflection that it had all been rendered possible by his own doings. With the conviction that so much might be left away from him, there came also a further feeling that after all there was a chance that his father had invented the story of his brother's illegitimacy, that Mountjoy was now free from debt, and that Tretton with all its belongings might now go back to him. That his father would do it if it were possible he did not doubt. From week to week he had waited impatiently for his father's demise, and had expected little or none of that mental activity which his father had exercised. "What a fool he had been," he said to himself, sitting opposite to Mountjoy, who in the vacancy of the moment had lighted another cigar;—"what an ass!" Had he played his cards better, had he comforted and flattered and cosseted the old man, Mountjoy might have gone his own way to the dogs. Now, at the best, Tretton would come to him stripped of everything; and,—at the worst,—no Tretton would come to him at all. "Well; what are you going to do?" he said roughly.

"I think I shall probably go down and just see the governor."

"All your feelings about your mother, then, are blown to the wind."

"My feelings about your mother are not blown to the winds at all; but to speak of her to you would be wasting breath."

"I hadn't the pleasure of knowing her," said Augustus. "And I am not aware

that she did me any great kindness in bringing me into the world. Do you go to Tretton this afternoon?"

"Probably not."

"Or to-morrow?"

"Possibly to-morrow," said Mountjoy.

"Because I shall find it convenient to have your room."

"To-day, of course, I cannot stir. To-morrow morning I should at any rate like to have my breakfast." Here he paused for a reply, but none came from his brother.

"I must have some money to go down to Tretton with; I suppose you can lend it me just for the present."

"Not a shilling," said Augustus in thorough ill-humour.

"I shall be able to pay you very shortly."

"Not a shilling. The return I have had from you for all that I have done, is not of a nature to make me do more."

"If I had ever thought that you had expended a sovereign except for the object of furthering some plot of your own, I should have been grateful. As it is I do not know that we owe very much to each other." Then he left the room, and, getting into a cab, went away to Lincoln's Inn.

Harry Annesley received Mr. Scarborough's letter down at Buston, and was much surprised by it. He had not spent the winter hitherto very pleasantly. His uncle he had never seen, though he had heard from day to day sundry stories of his wooing. He had soon given up his hunting, feeling himself ashamed, in his present nameless position, to ride Joshua Thoroughbung's horses. He had taken to hard reading, but the hard reading had failed and he had been given up to the miseries of his position. The hard reading had been continued for a fortnight or three weeks, during which he had at any rate respected himself; but in an evil hour he had allowed it to escape from him, and now was again miserable. Then the invitation from Tretton had been received. "I have got a letter. 'Tis from Mr. Scarborough of Tretton."

"What does Mr. Scarborough say?"

"He wants me to go down there."

"Do you know Mr. Scarborough? I believe you have altogether quarrelled with his son."

"Oh yes; I have quarrelled with Augustus, and have had an encounter with Mountjoy not on the most friendly terms. But the father and Mountjoy seem to be

reconciled. You can see his letter. I at any rate shall go there." To this Mr. Annesley senior had no objection to make.

NOTE.—The lamented death of Mr. Anthony Trollope will not in any way interfere with the continuation of "Mr. Scarborough's Family." The story was completed, and in the hands of the printer, some months ago.—EDITOR A. Y. R.

A LITTLE BIT OF FISH.

WITH rain pouring down in a persistent, hopeless way, while morning light feebly struggles through the blurred and misty chaos of night; with street-lamps shining in the wet asphalte as in some ink-black tarn, and along the wood pavement as a bordering of rough peaty morass; with the night-cab rattling wearily home, and the early workman more vigorously assaulting his master's shutters; with the homeless waifs of the night shivering under some poor shelter of projecting eaves; with the breakfast-stalls at the street corners, cans shining and cups clattering, the most cheerful objects in the surrounding waste, while the public-house close by, with one door tantalisingly opened in a painfully sober and even regretful mood, offers amends for the temptations of the night before in the announcement of hot coffee for early customers—with all these surroundings, what is the use of roving about with a soaked umbrella, and a general damp and dismal feeling, not being driven thereto by any inexorable necessity?

But then the appointment was made in broad sunshine—the appointment to meet at Number Five Hundred and Sixty-five stand in Bishopsgate depôt. "You're not to call it a market, you know," interpolates our friend with a knowing wink, "such not being permitted by the British Constitution." He is a very knowing little man, our friend with the wink, and hails from the east, where there are still some wise men left. From East Anglia—that is, from the land which is partly made up of shifting sea-sand and partly of condensed fogs and vapours from the Northern Sea—a man who is very knowing about fish, although not exactly a fishmonger, but ready to deal in that or any other commodity if there is money in it, with something of American smartness. Probably he is smart enough to stop at home this wild and windy morning; but, anyhow, it is a pleasant and comforting change from the wet and discomfort of Shoreditch to

the clean, dry, and resounding arches of old Bishopsgate Station. Clean they are, and white, and sweet-smelling with the scent of fresh-dug vegetables, of parsnips and carrots, and the aromatic celery; resounding, too, with heavy engines lumbering overhead, while outside brethren fresh from the fog and fen-lands shriek pathetically for admittance. But with all this tumult overhead, there is a cloistral quietude and stillness. Here all is warmth and shelter, with bright gas-burners overhead and dry solid pavement under foot. Here is a fine broad carriage-way, where a hundred carts might draw up, or perhaps a thousand costers' barrows, and upon the roadway open deep and commodious arches, where the produce of half a county might be stowed away. Behind these arches again, are lines of railway, where trucks can roll up and supply the cave at one end as fast as it is emptied at the other. This is the fruit and vegetable depôt, and on the other side of the building is a precisely similar arcade devoted to the purveying of fish—space, comfort, cleanliness, in equal proportion. But, excepting a yellow cart marked "Ice," and a railway waggon with a load of empty crates, there is no vehicular traffic, and the footsteps of the writer echo emptily from the vault above—the footsteps of the only visitor from the outside world.

Stay, at Number Five Hundred and Sixty-five, talking in hushed tones to the owner of the stand, who is enclosed in a barricade of dried fish—kippers, bloaters, red-herrings, Finnon haddocks, and salt cod, all highly respectable products of the deep, but not of a pressing nature nor requiring a visit at break of day—is my friend from the east countree, meeting reproval half way—for there had been visions of a fabulous pair of soles to be purchased at a marvellously low price—with the exclamation in deprecatory tones: "Ain't this a lovely place for business, only mark you it's all tentative as yet." Certainly here is everything that is wanted in a fish-market, except the fish and the people to buy them. And all that will come in time, says my sanguine friend. For look at the teeming population of the East End—a population, who, to judge from the whelks they consume, and the oysters when they can get them, and the mussels, and the countless saucers of stewed eels, are by nature fish-eaters, and would live and thrive on fish, if fish were comestable. And look at this great depôt in the very midst of them, and the other

end of it as it were on the very sea-coast by means of those blustering rumbling trains above, the coast of a sea that is teeming with all the best and most wholesome kinds of fish.

And can't supply a pair of soles to an unfortunate explorer who has come half-a-dozen miles to seek them! "My dear sir," cried the man of the east, extending his palms deprecatingly, "just think of the weather—a gale raging along the coast, and a sea that few boats could live in!" Yes, along the coast where the red and white lights from lighthouse, tower, and beacon-ship are just now paling in the sulky light—there the day is dawning over black and tumbled lines of billows—the sea drawing off and roaring in the distance, while on the patches of yellow sand, black and dismal hulls with broken stumps of masts are left to tell the tale of the lives of men who have been swallowed up in the remorseless waves.

With the thought of all this, the driving of the rain and the howling of the wind among the chimney-pots and house-tops assume a stern and melancholy cadence, as we wend our way towards Billingsgate. And long before we reach the precincts of the market there are signs that Billingsgate is itself, despite the weather, and in the full swing of its enormous traffic. Stray fishmonger's carts lurk about even as far as Gracechurch Street, and porters stagger about under heavy loads of fish. Eastcheap is lined with vehicles, men and horses patiently soaking in the rain. All down Fish Street Hill, the fishmongers are holding possession, while Monument Yard exhibits monuments of patience, horses and drivers sheltering as best they can from the pitiless downfall. But in Thames Street itself you have the true Billingsgate surrounded by the carts packed in a solid mass, the shouts, the cries, the oaths, the confusion, so that it is a relief to find shelter on a friendly wharf, and watch the scene more at ease. The turbid tide that threatens to overwhelm the City; ships and barges that seem to loom menacingly in the air above; steamers threatening to paddle bodily over the wharves, all awash and afloat themselves; the rain-rivers gurgling in the gutters and spouting through the gratings; with all this a confluence, a congress, a congestion of fishmongers, fish-carts, and fish-porters, the City choked with horses and vans, while it seems as if only a few feeble dividing walls of brick hinder the whole cavalcade from

sailing bodily madly away on the top of the tide! A scene only to be rendered allegorically after the taste of the seventeenth century, Aquarius and Pisces both in the ascendant, with Boreas blustering in the background, and Father Thames and Neptune hand-in-hand rioting through the City.

And yet, with all its manifold inconveniences, it is impossible to withhold a tribute of admiration to the go and pluck and enterprise that exist about this dirty, fishy, insolent, bad-languaged, bad-mannered Billingsgate.

But on a stormy morning like this, when the big iron steamers that have come up with the tide, show in battered sides and broken bulwarks the struggle they have had with the fierce enemy outside, on such a stern and stormy day as this, how can the little fisher-boats fight their way to market?

To this my knowing friend replies that the little fisher-boats are not so very little after all; and that the trawling fleet that chiefly supplies Billingsgate is composed of smacks of thirty or forty tons, built with a special eye to speed and sea-going qualities; smacks that cost twelve or thirteen hundred pounds apiece, found like yachts, well manned, and fitted to keep the sea in any weather. And a couple of these smacks being full of fish have run for Thames mouth, and hailing a tug as we might hail a hansom in the Strand, have run up to Billingsgate and are now landing their cargo, and will make a good day's work of it. At the same time a carrier steamer which collects fish from all the fleet, has fought its way to port, and brings a plentiful supply.

Yes, they are cruising about the Dogger Bank just now these trawlers, no doubt. The Dogger is a submerged island, some twenty fathoms under water, a sort of little Britain in shape, with its sharp end pointing towards Norway, while the blunt end looks in the direction of the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire coasts, and this sunken plain—which is not so very little after all, being some hundred and fifty miles long by sixty broad, and which would make a very fine pasture if we could haul it up and tack it on to Lincolnshire—supports as it is a splendid flock of submarine muttons. They are muttons that follow no shepherd, and that require some catching; but then the trawl is just the thing for the purpose. A bag-net, in fact, some hundred feet long,

its mouth kept open by a wooden beam, with a kind of stirrup-iron at each end to keep the beam off the ground and the mouth of the net in a properly yawning condition. Below, the bight of the net, weighted by a heavy ground rope, sweeps together all the finny denizens of the plain it encounters on its course. The trawl warp, a six-inch rope a hundred and fifty fathoms or so long, is joined by two bridles to either end of the trawl beam, and at the other end of the warp the hauling smack tugs gently but firmly, moving with the tide, but a little faster than the tide so as to keep the net always distended. The trawl-net is shot at the beginning of the tide, and worked for five or six hours over some twenty miles of sunken plain, and is then hauled up. And the hauling up in rough weather is a ticklish and difficult process, costing two or three hours' hard labour. But when once the net is on the deck, and the trawl beam hauled safely out of the way, the pull of a rope empties all the contents of the net on the deck. Then the fish are sorted and packed in the wooden boxes without lids so well known to the frequenters of Billingsgate. Turbot, brill, soles, dories, and mullet are known as prime, and are always packed together, while plaice, haddocks, and whiting take a less honourable place as offal.

Now, fifty years ago this deep-sea trawling was hardly known, and such few trawlers as there were hailed from Brixham in the west, or Barking on Thames. And the 'long-shore fishermen have always made, and still make bitter complaints of the damage done to their fishing by the trawlers, in disturbing fish and destroying spawn. But there seem to be little reason in these accusations. Not only are there more fish in the sea than ever came out of it, but the more fish that are caught the better supplied seem to be the fishing-grounds. And as to the spawn, it has been shown pretty clearly by recent investigations that, in a general way—herring-spawn being the principal exception—the spawn of fishes floats on the surface, and cannot be damaged by the trawl-nets. The progress of trawling has been almost an unmixed good to consumers. The fish caught in the deep-sea are finer, better-flavoured, and more wholesome than those caught along shore.

The Brixham men were the first to carry out the propaganda of trawl-fishing. They, it is said, colonised Ramsgate with

the new school of fishermen, and the Ramsgate men now revive the glories of the Cinque Ports—there are no better fishermen or braver boatmen than these. Hastings, too, contributes good men and true, and has its own trawling-grounds, known as the Diamond Grounds, the Varne, and the Ridge, and from the North Foreland far into the North Sea. It is computed that there are nearly two thousand of these venturesome trawling-boats all round the coast, employing, perhaps, twenty thousand hardy seamen. But London is not by any means the metropolis of this business, and Billingsgate, if profitable, is precarious. Grimsby, by the Humber mouth, is now the great fishing port, and the Grimsby dealers are some of the smartest and most enterprising in the trade. Hull, too, has its fair share of fishing enterprise, which has increased much since the discovery of Silver Pit Bank at the south end of Dogger Bank, about the year 1845. There are "Pit seasons," as the trawlers call them, when, after severe winters, soles are congregated on these banks in almost incredible numbers.

"There!" interrupts our knowing friend from the east. "Incredible number of soles! Doesn't that make your mouth water, my good sir?" To which I reply morosely that I have never been any the better for these incredible numbers, and doubt very much if the fishermen were who caught them. Should we get a decent pair of soles for half-a-crown were they thick as blackberries on a hedge? I trow not. Some people would get the benefit of them, no doubt, but these people would neither be the hardy fishermen nor the patient British public.

And that brings us to talk of the Billingsgate of old, when it was really what could be called a market, where producer and consumer met and bargained without the intervention of middle-men—such a Billingsgate as we see in the prints of the last century, when fine ladies made parties to buy fish at Billingsgate. A pretty sight, one would think—the women in their fine dresses and wide-spreading hats, and the fishermen chaffing from their boats or hauling baskets of shining many-coloured fish up the steps. Or the Billingsgate of the old "Survey." "A large water-gate portico, a Harbrough for ships and boats commonly arriving there with fish, both fresh and salt, shell-fishes, salt, oranges, onions, and other fruits and roots . . . and in the summer season

with abundance of cherries from Kent. And these stairs are very much resorted to by the Gravesend watermen, being the noted place to land and take water for that and other eastern towns down the river. And here the coal-men and wood-mongers meet every morning about eight or nine o'clock, this being their exchange for the coal trade."

But at that date also there were grievous complaints about the prices of fish, and, although Billingsgate was made a free market by the Tenth and Eleventh of William the Third, yet it seems that fish-mongers would buy up all the fish, and sell it again at greatly increased prices. Thus there is an order of the Lord Mayor, 1707, "so that citizens may have fish at the first hand for their own use."

Now we can't turn back the hands of the clock, and probably the customs of the age do not tend to the revival of retail markets. But some alteration is wanted in the method of sale and distribution. The projected fish-market at Shadwell may do something to cure the evil, but it is to be feared that the ring of fish speculators is too strong to give any new market a fair chance. Only, as things go now, the boundless riches of the sea are dribbled out in amazingly small quantities by their purveyors.

COURAGE: A CHAPTER OF EXPERIENCE.

THIS is no essay. At Alexandria the other day, I heard of a seaman who cut off two wounded fingers—his own—with a jack-knife, and turned up for duty as usual. The jack-knife had been lately used for shredding tobacco, and, when the mutilation was discovered, this poor fellow's arm had fallen into such a state that the doctors feared they must cut it off.

The story reminded me of an incident which occurred within my knowledge more than twenty years ago; and that suggested others. I am not going to argue or theorise, but simply to hold the pen whilst memory drives.

A match to the sailor's plucky deed was that of Grimbold, a sergeant of Rajah Brooke's police. When the Chinese attacked his post, after a gallant resistance he jumped from an embrasure, and cut his way through the crowd. A bullet shattered his forearm. Grimbold borrowed a native sword, with which, and a small pen-knife, he amputated his limb at the elbow, tied

it up, and marched nearly two miles in an effort to join the Rajah. In custody at the fort, when the Chinese appeared, was a madman. Him Grimbolt armed and posted. But the maniac refused to crouch under shelter. He swore that to hide was unworthy a brave man, and planted himself in the verandah, alone against a thousand. There he blazed away like the sanest of invulnerable epic heroes. When Grimbolt decided to evacuate the place, the madman, unhurt, obeyed his call. But he refused to jump from a window, and the others left him eagerly unbarring a door that he might sally forth like a gentleman.

This man evidently understood the danger, but did not feel it. Some infirmities are great aids to nerve. I remember a war-correspondent, stone deaf, whose recklessness in pushing under fire, and coolness where the bullets flew thick, impressed the Turks, who watched him with a superstitious feeling. Wholly bereft of hearing, he could not recognise one quarter of the peril, and the awful din of battle affected him not at all. This gentleman made several campaigns, and was killed in Armenia, I believe.

The tricks imagination plays on courage are endless, sometimes kindly, more often cruel. Once on a time—the date is recent—a small English force lay for some days in a terribly exposed position. Experienced officers did not talk publicly of the ugly chances round. Two young fellows shared a tent; the one had seen much service in little time, the other was quite fresh, full of confidence, only longing that the enemy would show. He chaffed his comrade on his nervousness, until the latter, being also young, was tempted to open the youth's eyes, and showed how desperate would be their case under certain most probable conditions. After that explanation, he went to sleep; his fire-eating chum declares that he slept no more until circumstances changed. Of these young men, who behaved so differently, one has now the Victoria Cross; the second displays a medal with two clasps, and he won his company before his beard was fairly grown.

There are those incapable of fear, be the peril of what sort it may, savage man, disease, accident, death itself—the assured cessation of living. But they are very, very few; personally I have recognised but one. Many men and some women are proof against most dangers, but they dread one form, or perhaps several. In thinking of such persons, Scobelev naturally recurs

to one's mind. He once declared to me that he was terribly afraid of mere death. He said also that his fearlessness was a habit, which, if poverty and a sense of ill-usage had not made him desperate, he would never have found courage to acquire. But Scobelev loved a paradox—a reckless talker upon every subject, he was specially untrustworthy about himself.

I should rather incline to think that mere courage is more general amongst Russians than amongst any other people nowadays. I mean the unreasoning, irresponsible readiness of a dog to risk life and liberty upon provocation. Not more volunteers rush out, when a desperate enterprise is mooted, than from our own ranks; more than all is a mathematical absurdity. But the Englishman stakes his life in another, a grander spirit. He feels, and reckons with, the peril. Before meeting it, so far as I have seen examples, he is quiet, thoughtful, contemplating the worst, and making his arrangements. A Russian scorns all that, does not even think of it. After assuring himself, rather roughly, that the needful dispositions have been made, he becomes the lightest-hearted of the company to which he hastens. I do not say affects to become, for it may well be that deadly danger stirs him to mirth, as it stirs another man, equally brave, to self-commune. I cannot forget an instance on Radisovo Hill, the morning of the great attack. An infantry regiment stood at ease in the rain, waiting the order to descend into that valley blind with smoke, echoing with thud of guns and angry crackle of musketry. The colonel and a staff-captain approached, and asked us to accept charge of letters for their wives, to be forwarded in case of accident. Then they stood, chatting of London and Paris, with the warmth of men whose hearts were there, though the battle raged closer, and a ball now and then musically spun above our heads. They asked the precise story of a scandal half-forgotten now, and their shrewd comments told they were attending closely, when an aide came galloping through the mist. Three minutes afterwards the doomed regiment filed away, down towards the valley of death.

Baker Pasha loves to recount an instance of the courage we are used to think truly British. During his grand retreat, which the greatest of living soldiers declared "a master-work," it became necessary to fire a large Bulgar village.

Baker sent a company to do the work. Time passed, but no smoke arose. One after another he despatched four orderlies, to ask the cause of the delay; none returned. Then the general turned to his aide-de-camp: "Go, Alix," he said, "and see what those fools are doing!" Alix went full gallop, a Circassian behind. He did not come back, but the smoke appeared in thin wreaths. Every moment pressed. Baker sent another company, with another English officer. At the entrance of the village they found two orderlies dead, and no sign of troops. But the village, full of lusty Bulgars, was buzzing like a hive. They pushed on. In the middle space, the Chirkess stood, holding two horses; Alix, alone in a maddened throng, was moving from hut to hut, setting the thatch alight with matches. So the village was burnt, and the retreating Turks gained that delay which saved them—saved, perhaps, Stamboul, and so saved England from a desperate war.

I do not know that this story has been printed, though many have heard it. No one is more disinclined than I to single out persons for adorning my tale, when the name has not been officially announced; but the valiant deeds of a soldier in performance of his duty are excepted from the rule.

Of a class quite different was the fine devotion of Lord Gifford during the Ashanti War. He undertook the scouting for our advance, under conditions as unlike as could possibly be to those which usually attend such duties. We scarcely saw him after he had entered the woods. At the passage of the Adansi Hills, Lord Gifford paid us a visit, and he turned up, of course, at the battle of Amoafu, gaining his V.C., nominally, for valour displayed in the assault of Bequoi next day. But the reward was won before that, when he led his gallant little company miles in front of our outposts and advance-guards, creeping round the savage foe, cutting off stragglers to get information, watching from the bush at midnight such awful scenes as the bloody burial of Amanquattiah. Lord Gifford had with him, if I remember rightly, two West Indian soldiers, two Kossus, two Houssas, and a miscellaneous collection of barbarians, the wildest and most ferocious to be obtained on the recommendation of woodcraft and devilry. As we passed upon the march his lonely camps deserted, the fires long extinct in the circlet of piled boughs and entangle-

ments of vines, the least imaginative felt a shock—so lonely and lost they seemed in the shadow of the forest, between the savage enemy and ourselves.

Of all classes, the bravest certainly is the sailor. His way of life from childhood trains him to be fearless, to be very shrewd within a certain limited purview, to be open-handed of superfluities, to be instinctively conscious of his own interests and resolute in securing them. But all who have served with them ashore remark a characteristic of sailors, which, undiscussed and unanalysed, causes that want of confidence which nearly all soldiers feel in a naval brigade. English officers entertain it more than do others; as for Jack, his careless pride of self has not admitted it possible that a soldier could look down on him. But in foreign armies and navies the same idea prevails, to a less extent only because fewer instances of common service have suggested it. I am sure I know the reason, and it is as simple as can be. The better the sailor the more has he studied, and the more is he acquainted with, the dangers that threaten him at sea. A storm sweeps down with insufficient warning, or no warning at all; an enemy may appear on the horizon, coming out of space, as it were, and in an hour he may be fighting for life. The safety of all in a troublous time may depend on the wakefulness, the judgment of one man, and if there be a flaw in arrangements over which few or none on board have control, all is lost. Trained in such ideas until they become an instinct, the sailor goes ashore, to take part in military operations. He sees, as one may say, no man at the mast-head to give alarm. The position he is set to hold is isolated, or at least open on one side. The enemy is known to lie in overwhelming numbers somewhere about. Why should he not come down and overwhelm the fort? With the preconceived idea that soldiers are all more or less incapable, the officers of a naval brigade in such case are doubly convinced that the ship must depend upon itself. They raise redoubts and works; they dig like gnomes; cheerfully, yet with an injured sense, they keep sentry and picket guard in such extravagant fashion as sailors only could endure. The military officer observes them with polite derision. He knows, for instance, having studied the ground and the circumstances, that to advance from the direction which those good fellows are watching so zealously, an enemy must march three days without

water. He has confidence that although no look-out be visible, shrewd heads are employing active means, not less efficient, to ensure the general safety. He has no experience which teaches him to expect danger continually from powers and accidents unseen, unsuspected. In short, he is not used to storms, nor to the sudden appearance of hostile forces out of space, nor to a foe who carries with him wherever he goes all things needful for combat and subsistence. And he seldom reflects upon the difference of his education and the sailor's.

No one has ever questioned the supreme fighting zeal of a naval brigade, which in all countries, I think, is superior to that of soldiers. But again, if the rout come, after the seamen have done their best, their instinct betrays itself. I have never personally seen a *saue qui peut* of sailors, but I am told that it is much more hopeless than that of an army. And I should be inclined to believe so. For when the ship is obviously lost, men take to the boats, and that familiar discipline which keeps order in emergency at sea, is absent under the conditions of land service. The individuality which a sailor's life tends to encourage, and to suppress which is the tendency of the soldier's training, obtains freer control, and every man looks to his own safety.

The bravest race of savages, I think, amongst the many I have known, is the Montenegrin; but whilst I write, competitors recur to mind. Every square foot of the Black Mountain has its legend of desperate fight, often disastrous, but always honourable. A little instance of Montenegrin courage, which came under my own eyes is much prettier than any of the stories recounted by the wandering bard. Whilst Dulcigno was threatened by European fleets and Montenegrin armies, the Albanians holding it, a dense smoke arose one day in that quarter. The news of this phenomenon spread widely, and caused a positive statement in all the morning papers of the civilised world that the Albanians had fired their town. At sunset, unable to get news, and the people being much excited, I hired a boat at Pristaw Antivari for the purpose of reconnoitring. A young officer had come down on business from the camp at Sutormans. He said to me: "What is the use of your going to Dulcigno, when you are not acquainted with the language of your boatmen, and you don't know the country? Send a

message to Buko Petrovitch, the general, telling him I have gone in your boat to enquire. I will bring you news."

So I sent a note to the general, and forthwith his young officer started. At morning the boat returned, without him, but the men were charged to tell me that Dulcigno stood just as usual. Presently the commandant came, laughing. He said: "Effendi, that youth has made fools of us. He wanted to see his sweetheart in Dulcigno, and when the boat drew near, he swam to land. If the Ghegghes catch him, they'll flay him alive." I don't know whether they caught him, but he did not return whilst I stayed, nor did he rejoin the army, for Buko Petrovitch sent to ask about him, ten days afterwards.

Afghan courage is undeniable; but it belongs to the fervid class. In a headlong charge—for resistance to the death when that issue has been resolved beforehand—no people on earth excel the Pathans. But an accident will strangely disconcert their minds; they seldom fight a lost battle. The history of their wars is as full of panic-defeats as of heroic victories. The Piper of Jellalabad represents a type among them. At a certain hour every evening he used to climb a hill at the very limit of musket-range, blow his pibroch, dance his jig of defiance, and withdraw. An admiring retinue attended him, heedless of the shots which occasionally told. At length an English marksman killed the piper, whose renown will be preserved for generations in the name he gave that hill. After his death, not one of the hundreds who had seemed indifferent to peril, challenged our fire. Cases of the same sort frequently occurred in the last war. At Jamrud fort the sentries were potted at every night by the same man, or, at least by the same weapon, for its peculiar report was recognised. One night, as we sat in the mess-room, a detonation louder than usual drew our notice. In the morning we found a burst pistol, rifled, and from that time our sentries were no longer molested. Natives presently reported that the man was unhurt, but neither he nor his fellows resumed their firing practice.

In that reckless bloodthirstiness which contains, of course, a proportion of courage, but which is more properly described as devilry, the Pathan will not be out-Heroded. I do not speak of Ghazis, or "martyrs for the faith," who murder to win heaven, and accept death as

essential to the merit of the deed. The Afghan who, without vows or illusions, sees an opportunity to perform a desperate act which will bring him pleasure or profit, is not easily deterred by the danger of retribution. And he displays great presence of mind. Some English officers riding through the Khurd Khyber heard shots. They quickened their pace, and at a turn of the defile ran into a brisk skirmish. Three men were defending some loaded donkeys against an equal number who fired at them from behind the rocks. The former pushed on and claimed protection, declaring themselves peaceful traders attacked by banditti. The latter left hiding and hurried up to tell their story; whereupon the three first rushed at them and cut them down, killing all before they could speak.

It came out afterwards that these unfortunates were the owners of the goods and cattle, looted first and then murdered. This ugly tale reminds me of the death of General Maude's bheestie, who was filling his masak at the well not two hundred yards from Lundi Kotal camp, when the general passed with his escort. The well was much frequented, and some Pathans were seated there. Before General Maude reached the tents, his bheestie overtook him, and fell headlong in the road, cut literally into bits. An impulse of homicide had seized the Pathans, and they had allowed it play.

I do not believe in the courage of Bedouins, still less of Egyptians. But though we admit all the confidence which skill and tried success will bestow, it was a plucky feat to drive forty oxen from the lines at Kassassin and bring them into Tel-el-Kebir. That the Bedouin scouts performed this feat, as they boasted, has been vehemently denied, of course, but I am afraid the story is true. All the prisoners taken on the 28th of September declared it; some had seen the oxen, and they described them as foreign—certainly not Egyptian. They agreed, also, that the Bedouins' report was the cause of the attack which was made two days later—for it represented that the English camp was unguarded, that the troops were scattered, and so worn out by sickness that they could not stand a serious onslaught.

For courage and skill in looting cattle, no race of scoundrels can make a show with the Marris and other dwellers on the frontier of Sindh. The ingenuity of these

people is almost uncanny. They have a knowledge of the bovine character well worth scientific attention, and they use it in conjunction with a study of human frailties which is equally minute. The simplest of their processes is to cut through the stable wall—cattle are always stabled in a country so perilous for them—and lead out the animals. Two or three boys are entrusted with a business of this kind, and they are expected to succeed, though it be needful to make the oxen step over a watcher's body. At one of our posts the commissariat cattle were lodged in a walled enclosure, which contained several masses of ruin. Every morning the tale of beasts was short. In vain the distracted go-master applied for more sentries and more frequent rounds. At length, by mere accident, the secret of the nightly disappearances came out. Thieves had tunnelled under the wall, shielding either exit behind ruins. Such engineering work is familiar to people who conduct water underground from the spring to the place where it is wanted. But to induce half-wild cattle to descend a steep incline, pitch dark, hot as a furnace nearly, and that without making a suspicious sound, requires either arts unholy or such influence as one would like to observe in action.

The Arab proper, neither Egyptian nor Bedouin, is very distinctly a brave man in the European sense. I do not believe that his part in history is played out. In a very few years he will be free of his incubus, the Turk, the field of emigration open to his most active and enterprising sons will be terribly narrowed, and an Arab civilisation may again appear. All the soldierly feelings are strong in them now.

During the Russian War a young Arab officer was taken on the Lom. His gallantry in the action had been observed by admiring enemies, and one high in authority tried to get him freed or exchanged. He asked the prisoner's word of honour that he would not fight again if liberated, and it was given. Shortly afterwards a desperate opportunity of escape presented itself. The Arab seized it and got away. In the Turkish lines he was received with joy, and promoted then and there; but he refused to serve, recounting his promise. The general would not admit it binding and threatened to shoot him, as a coward, in the back; and shot he was. A relation of the youth told me this story at Constantinople. I believe one might find many

Arab soldiers (not Egyptians) who would die rather than break their plighted word.

In the sum of military honour, no army is so punctilious as the German. That superb machine is braced and upheld by a code of such minuteness and severity as no other people would carry out. Crack regiments in the Russian service hold themselves together, and preserve the honour of the corps with strict vigilance, but their rules are fantastic, and still more so the execution of them. The doom of suicide has been passed upon a German officer, if stories are true, but in Russia it has been pronounced not once, nor a hundred times. For some terrible scandal, a cavalry regiment was exiled to Central Asia. It held an enquiry upon the officers implicated, and the one found guiltiest was significantly told that a man of honour would not survive the shame of bringing disgrace upon his uniform. In such a case, a German would, perhaps, have taken his own life quietly, but the Russian did nothing of the sort. On parade next day, he charged the colonel with drawn sword, and was promptly shot. I have been told that the proportion of officers who die a violent death in time of peace, in Central Asian stations, is enormous.

It is common clap-trap of the cosmopolitan philosophy, that every man is brave. The soldier and the traveller know better. Nearly every man can be trained to hold his place in the ranks, and most men will rush forward with their fellows, if there be enough of them, and they shout. But this is not individual courage. I am not sure we are as brave as were our forefathers, but, if so, other nations have deteriorated in the same measure, for we keep the relative position they held. Unfortunately, courage will not save a state, nor win battles nowadays, unless it be backed by force, and I am acquainted with no authority who does not admit in private that he regards the chance of a serious struggle with panic. If England maintained at home but a hundred thousand men ready for service abroad, what a blessed revolution that force would bring about! Free to ally herself on the side of right, whichever it were, she would be mistress and arbiter of Europe, which would needs disarm before this new power.

TO-NIGHT.

I SET myself as a task to rhyme

To-night;
For I knew that the hand of the olden time,
Had lost its might;

That the cadenced words that wont to chime,
As true,
And sweet as the bees in the murmurous lime,
In summer do,
Had grown as fickle, and cold, and shy,
As the sunbeams are in an autumn sky;
And so, because I loved the strain,
That used to ring for my joy or pain,
I strove to waken the spell again,
Of rhyme and rhythm and sweet refrain,
Nor heeded the bode, that sighed "in vain,"
To-night.

I sate alone by the blazing ingle
To-night,
And tried to fashion the musical jingle
For my delight;
Why should the soft sounds shun to mingle
Aright,
Because I am old and sad and single,
In the hearth-light?
Why? Have I loved so well and long
The beauty of earth and the voice of song,
To forget at last how the rich red rose
Still droops on her stalk with the August's close;
That the bright beck stops in its ebbs and flows,
As the ice-bar creeps 'neath the drifted snows;
And my heart takes the lesson that Nature knows,
To-night?

CHRISTMAS ROSES.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

"If I tell you something, Belle, you must promise not to be angry."

"I'll promise to try. What is it?" asked Belle.

"I think, if I were you, I would give Mr. Kendal a gentle hint that absence from you should be a time of grief for him. Perhaps, though, it is, and that is the reason he would give for amusing himself with someone else."

"What do you mean, Carrie?"

"There, now, you said you wouldn't be angry."

"I'm not; I only want to know what your mysterious hints mean."

"Then I'll tell you. I've been staying near Farehurst lately, and I was told that Mr. Kendal was engaged to a Miss Thorne there. Of course I didn't believe it, as I knew he was engaged to you; but there must be some reason for a report of that kind, so I thought I would give you a friendly hint."

"Thank you; it's only a spiteful rumour, of course. Tom is as good a lover as I could imagine."

"I'm glad," replied Carrie, "that you don't take it seriously. But after all, Belle, take my word for it as a married woman, a lover is none the less careful if he knows that his fiancée keeps her eyes and ears open."

"I can trust him without playing the spy," returned Belle.

"I don't want you to take the next train to Farehurst and charge him with his falseness, or to go down and watch round Miss Thorne's house till Mr. Kendal makes his appearance at the front door. By-the-bye, that would be no use just now, for she has come to town I heard."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Where's Mr. Kendal?"

"At Farehurst. He won't be in town again for a week or two."

"I'm glad to hear that. Don't think too much of what I've told you; but I thought it was my duty to let you know."

The two ladies were talking in the twilight of a December afternoon. The large wood fire threw a rich glow into the room, the heat was so great that Belle was obliged to hold a large peacock-feather screen before her. Perhaps, though, as her companion guessed, this was done as much to hide her face from scrutiny as to shield her from the heat.

Belle had finished a long letter to her lover that afternoon, she was now considering whether it was not too affectionate, and whether a short postscript would not be an improvement. The point was still undecided when there was a ring at the door. A few moments afterwards, the servant announced Mr. Kendal.

Belle greeted him with a shade less than her accustomed warmth, but Kendal naturally put that down to the presence of a visitor. He was introduced to Mrs. Fletcher, but that lady soon took her departure, feeling that she was decidedly in the way.

"Don't make too much of what I said," she whispered to Belle as she said good-bye. "I shall come and see you again before I go back to Hertfordshire."

As soon as she was gone Belle turned to Kendal.

"I thought you were not coming to town for a fortnight?" she said.

"I didn't expect to, my pet, but business called me up, and I found I had time to run down and see you."

"When did you come?"

"Yesterday; but I couldn't get here before."

"Why didn't you write to tell me? I might have been out this afternoon."

"I didn't know till too late. I expected not to have a chance of getting as far as Hampstead; I knew you wouldn't like it if you knew I was in town without

coming to see you, so I said nothing about it."

"You must have had a cold journey; it was bitter yesterday. Were you alone?"

"No; I had a companion."

"Who?"

"A Miss Thorne. I don't suppose you have ever heard of her."

"Yes, I have. I suppose you saw her to her destination?"

"Yes, worse luck; I was let in for that, awful nuisance it was."

Kendal had by this time recognised the fact that the conversation had assumed a very unusual tone. When he met Belle as a rule, he found her unrestrainedly glad to see him; she overflowed with kindness, there was never a shade of unpleasantness. Now she was catechising him as if he had been committing some terrible fault.

"I say, Belle," he exclaimed, "what's the matter with you to-day? You seem rather annoyed that I've turned up, instead of glad to see me."

"I am rather out of sorts to-day," pleaded Belle. "But I'm very glad to see you."

They were sitting on low armchairs in front of the fire. He took up her screen and held it in front of his face.

"Does the fire hurt your eyes?" asked Belle.

"Yes; it is rather a conspicuous blaze."

"How have they been lately?"

"My eyes? Oh, thanks, I hope they'll be all right soon."

"I hope so, I'm sure," returned Belle.

"Who is this Miss Thorne?" she continued.

It had crossed Belle's mind that it was a curious coincidence that he should have made an unexpected visit to town on the same day as Miss Thorne.

"Who is she? Nobody in particular; a very decent sort of girl who lives at Farehurst."

"Is she rich?"

"She's pretty well off, I believe."

"Where is she staying now?"

"With some friends at Clapham. But I say, Belle, why do you want to know about her? Are you anxious to write her biography?"

"No," replied Belle, "only I've heard about her."

"Who from?" asked her lover uncomfortably.

"Never mind; there are little birds who whisper in people's ears, you know."

"I know that if I got hold of one of

those precious little birds, I'd stop her singing for her. What has she whispered about Miss Thorne? For 'tis a she of course."

"She whispered to me that a certain gentleman pays a good deal of attention to her."

"Well, I expect a good many do; Miss Thorne's rather a beauty," replied Kendal.

"Yes; but the certain gentleman I mean is already engaged."

"You mean me, I suppose?"

"You are becoming intelligent at last."

"Is it a mark of intelligence to be ready to take insinuations affecting myself?"

"Can you, Tom, really, truthfully say that there is no ground for them?"

Kendal hesitated. Since he had become engaged to Belle he had only one thing to reproach himself with; that one was a flirtation with Miss Thorne. Rather less than a week ago she had discovered that he was engaged to a lady in London, a discovery that took her by surprise. She had told him of her discovery when next they met, and had not scrupled to add that she thought he was giving himself a good deal of latitude in calling to see her three times in a week; for Miss Thorne was an outspoken lady, and felt herself aggrieved by his deception. Not that she was at all in love with him; she was as far from that as possible; her sympathies were entirely with the forsaken and forlorn girl in London—as she chose to consider her. So during the last week Kendal and she had not met, and it was by pure accident that they had travelled to town together. It was also chiefly through her persuasion that he resolved to make time somehow to call on Belle.

"You mustn't be absurd, my darling," he said in reply to her direct question. "Down in a little country village, like Farehurst, people wouldn't know what to do unless they could employ themselves in inventing scandal. If two people happen to meet by accident once or twice a week, the rest of the village begin to discuss what the presents will be, and whether they will be married this year or next."

"You haven't answered my question," said Belle, when he had finished.

"If you are jealous of Miss Thorne, all I can say is that you have no need to be."

"Have I no reason to be either?"

"Not that I'm aware of. I haven't spoken to her for a week."

"Till yesterday."

"Till yesterday! Look here, Belle, what

is the use of going on like this? You know well enough that I don't care a straw for anyone but you. Why must you try and create unpleasantness in this way?"

"Whose fault is it?" asked Belle.

"Supposing that it were mine——" began Kendal, but Belle interrupted him.

"It is not a matter of supposition, is it?"

"Very well, say that it is mine; say that when I've been down at Farehurst I haven't lived the life of a hermit under a vow of silence, but have talked to anyone I met in the usual way; is that any reason why you should be annoyed? Miss Thorne and I are old friends, nothing more; scarcely that now, for we had a quarrel the other day."

"People must be intimate who quarrel," remarked Belle. "What was the quarrel about?"

Kendal did not answer.

"About me, I suppose?"

At this juncture the door opened, and the servant entered with a lamp. The fire had burnt down and the room was almost dark; the bright light coming suddenly made Kendal put his hand to his eyes.

"Shall I bring up tea, miss?"

"Yes, please."

The servant went out after pulling the curtains close. Belle went to Kendal and put her hand on his arm.

"Tom dear, I didn't mean to say all that I did. I couldn't have said it if it hadn't been dark. Now that it is light again, and I can see your face, I don't believe it so much as I did. Just say that you have never cared a bit for Miss Thorne, and I'll forgive you everything."

"I don't quite see what there will be to forgive in that case," said Tom with a laugh. "I must say good-bye now, my dearest, I've only just time to get back."

"Hallo, Kendal!" exclaimed Belle's brother Charlie, suddenly entering the room, "I didn't know you were here."

"I'm just off again," replied Kendal; "a flying visit."

"When are you going back? Can't you stop?"

"No, thanks; I must be off at once."

"That's a nuisance; good-bye."

Charlie had the grace to go out of the room, leaving the lovers alone. Kendal tried to give Belle a hasty kiss or two and then go; but she held his arm.

"You haven't answered my question, Tom," she said.

"Why, my little pet, how you do harp on that melancholy string. I don't care two straws for Miss Thorne; is that enough for you? Yes, of course it is! Now give me that Christmas rose as a mark of forgiveness."

But Belle did not take the flower from its resting-place. Voices were heard outside; more brothers were approaching. Kendal gave her a final kiss, whispered in her ear: "Give me a flower when you have forgiven me," and hurried away.

Belle snatched the Christmas rose from her breast and held it out, but it was too late.

CHAPTER II.

KENDAL did not go to Paddington to catch the train for Farehurst. He went to an hotel. He eat his dinner in the coffee-room, and then retired to his bedroom.

Though it was scarcely seven he undressed and got into bed.

He had not been there more than an hour when a visitor was announced, Dr. Farebrother.

"That's right," said the doctor, entering, "I'm glad to see you are wise. Tie a silk handkerchief over your eyes before you go to sleep, and submit to be fed at breakfast. You will be round at the hospital by eleven?"

"Yes, I shall bring a few things with me; how long do you think I shall be there?"

"I don't quite know; it depends on the success of the operation. I hope a week will be sufficient. It will be rather weary work for you, I'm afraid, but it can't be helped; you had better write to your friends to come to see you after the first day; I will arrange for their admittance. After all you will be quite as cheerful in hospital as alone in an hotel."

"Yes, rather more so."

"You've had no special pain to-day?"

"No, just as usual."

"Well, hope for the best; there's every chance of a perfect cure. Good-night. Eleven to-morrow."

"Good-night, doctor."

The solitary candle departed with the oculist, leaving Kendal in darkness. For the last six months he had been increasingly aware of the fact that something was the matter with his eyes; he had paid recently a visit to the celebrated oculist, Dr. Farebrother, who had advised an operation. He did not conceal from his patient that it would be a dangerous

one. There was a risk of losing his eyesight, but there was a certainty of its loss if no operation was performed. So Kendal determined to run the risk, and this journey to town was to undergo it. He had kept it a secret from Belle. Until it was over, and he knew the worst or best, he had resolved that she should be in ignorance of it. It was not a pleasant thought as he lay alone in the darkness, that he had that afternoon, for the first time since their engagement, parted from her without her giving him a kiss.

"Never mind," he thought, "she will be sure to send me a flower to-morrow, and all my letters will be forwarded to me from home."

It was by the oculist's advice that he was to undergo the operation in the hospital. "You see, Mr. Kendal," he had said, "in the hospital we have every possible appliance on the spot; we can administer the chloroform more satisfactorily, and after it is over you will have constant attention and care, more than you could possibly get from a nurse. Besides, the operation is a rare one, and you will be doing a service to science if you will let me perform it in sight of the students."

"In the hospital, then, by all means," Kendal had replied. "You have been accumulating unnecessary reasons; I'm quite ready to go wherever you wish."

At last the time was nearly come; he had, perhaps, seen daylight for the last time in his life. It was not the pleasantest thought in the world. However, he was young, and hope was strong within him; so he tried to believe that all would turn out for the best. He fell asleep about midnight thinking of Belle.

Four days after he was lying in a white-washed ward, in a bed which was the picture of neatness when he had entered it, but was anything but that just now. His head was wrapped in black silk, to keep any particle of light from reaching his eyes; he had not been shaved since the morning of the day on which he had seen Belle; his hair was tumbled about in all directions. He was getting very tired of lying there as helpless as a child, being fed by the nurse as if he were two years old. He had occasional visits from friends, but no relation was there; even his mother thought that he was in London on business. There was no end to be gained by letting them know; they would only have a week's anxiety which they would be better spared.

He was lying there wondering when the day would end, though the day was much the same to him as the night, when a nurse approached.

"There are some letters for you, sir, if you would like them read to you."

Kendal having assented, the nurse opened them; they had been sent on from the hotel at which his parents thought he was staying. Three were of no importance; the next was one from his sister. It was very interesting to him from the first word to the last; to us a paragraph will be sufficient:

"News has just reached us that Miss Thorne is engaged to Mr. Cartwright, the son of the great millowner and M.P. I'm very glad to hear it, and I hope you won't be sorry. When do you expect to be able to return home?"

Kendal gave a sigh of relief as the nurse read this paragraph; he would be able to convince Belle now that her fears were unfounded, and free himself from the necessity of confessing that his conduct had not been quite what it should have been.

"Are there no more?" he asked as the nurse finished.

"No, sir; this is the last."

"Thank you," said Kendal. How was it, he wondered, that Belle had never written him a line, had never sent him a flower as a sign that she had forgiven and forgotten their first misunderstanding? He could not guess.

The reason was that Belle had discovered that her lover had not returned to Farehurst, as he gave her to understand he was about to do when he parted from her. The day after their quarrel she had intended writing to him to tell him how sorry she was that she had said what she had; she had even saved the identical Christmas rose to send him as a token of reconciliation, when she heard that he was still in London. So Belle had not sent the flower or even a letter. She had determined to wait till he wrote.

Two days more dragged their interminable hours along; Kendal was still in total darkness. However, on this day Dr. Farebrother made a careful examination of his condition, and informing him that there was no doubt about the success of the operation, told him that by next day he might hope to have his first glimpse of light again. Kendal felt a great load lifted off his mind. He need no longer look upon himself as a possibly blind man.

But now that his mind was relieved on that score the mystery of his receiving no letter from Belle became all the more pressing. Did she intend to make a regular quarrel of their misunderstanding? If so he was helpless till well enough to go and see her.

He was still meditating on this subject, when he heard footsteps approach his bed. They stopped before they reached him, and he heard a short conversation between his next neighbour and the visitor. The latter then came to him.

"I don't think I've seen you here before," said a soft voice; "the nurse tells me that you have had an operation on your eyes; shall I read to you for a little while?"

What were Kendal's feelings when he heard close to him the voice of Belle. For a moment he was undecided whether to wildly try to grasp her hand and bless her for coming to visit him in his loneliness; but he restrained himself. Evidently she did not recognise him—which was not to be wondered at. It would be wisest to proceed cautiously. Perhaps he might make something out of her visit.

"Thank you kindly, miss," he replied to her question. "I'd sooner hear you talk if you don't mind. I never was great at reading."

He assumed a country accent, and Belle was quite deceived.

"Very well," she said, "though I haven't long to stay to-day. When do you expect to be well again?"

"I hope as how a week will see me home again, miss."

"I hope so, I'm sure. Where is your home?"

"Not so far away, miss; 'bout sixty miles. Have you ever heard on Farehurst?"

Blind though he was, Kendal was aware of a start on Belle's part.

"Yes," she replied after a moment's hesitation. "I have a friend living there. I wonder if you know her."

"What's her name, miss? I know most of the folk thereabouts."

"Miss Thorne."

"Miss Thorne of The Grange?"

"Yes, I believe so; the one who is rich."

"Both on 'em's rich, miss."

"The young one."

"Both on 'em's young, miss."

Belle stopped. She had almost come to the end of the distinguishing characteristics of the Miss Thorne she was interested in. She determined to take a final step.

"I mean the one who is engaged to a Mr. Kendal."

"Neither on 'em is engaged to Mr. Kendal, miss. One on 'em's going to be married to a capting next week, and the other is going to marry a London chap—so I heard say at Farehurst the day I come up here."

"Is that the one that is in London now?" asked Belle quickly.

"Yes, miss; she come up little more nor a week ago. I knows, you see, because I keep company with one of the housemaids at The Grange—Polly Smith. I don't know if you've heard on her."

"No, my good fellow, I haven't, but I'm sure I hope you will be happy with her. I must go now and have a chat with some of your neighbours."

"Ay, well, miss, but I wish you could stop. Seems to me the place got brighter when you came in, and 'twas so homely like to find you knew Miss Thorne and Mr. Kendal, and all the folk down at Farehurst."

"Do you know Mr. Kendal?" asked Bell, her curiosity again excited by the mention of her lover's name.

Kendal determined to do himself a good turn.

"Do I know Mr. Kendal?" he repeated. "I should think I do, and a finer young gentleman don't live in our parts. He's been that kind to me that words won't express."

"He is going to be married soon, isn't he?"

"So they say, miss. I've heard that some fine London lady is in love with him, but I don't much care about they London ladies; they're crochety, from what I hear, and want more attention and looking arter than a new-born calf. Ay, well, she's got a fine beau, and I hopes he's satisfied. It's none of my business."

"What is your name?" asked Belle. "I must enquire after you when I next go to Farehurst."

"Stokes, miss. You ask at the bar of The Blue Dragon for Jack Stokes, and they'll tell you where I am."

Belle was amused at the thought of herself standing at the bar of The Blue Dragon; she smiled, knowing that her smile could not be seen.

"Ain't they flowers, miss, you have?" asked Kendal.

"Yes, I have a few; would you like one?"

"Ay, that I should, miss, if you'd be so good."

"Which will you have, a Christmas rose or a piece of heliotrope?"

"A rose, please, miss; I allays liked they Christmas roses, coming right in the dead of winter as if to say that summer will come again."

This was a sufficiently commonplace thought, nevertheless Belle was pleased to hear an ordinary country fellow express himself in that way. She handed him the flower, which he took carefully.

"There now," he exclaimed petulantly, "if I ain't gone and broken a petal off. Ay, but I shall be glad when I get my eyesight again."

"Let me give you another instead," said Belle.

"No, miss; no, thank ye. I'll keep this one if you don't mind. I can't see it's broken."

"I really must go now," said Belle. "Good-bye. I hope you'll be gone when I come next time."

"I should like to come back then just for half an hour," replied Kendal. "Good-bye, miss, and many thanks for the flower. I shall keep it for many a day."

Belle passed on to another ward, wondering at the strange coincidence which led her to the bedside of a man from Farehurst. She walked on with a light heart; at all events her lover was safe from the wiles of Miss Thorne, and it was very gratifying to find him so well spoken of.

When she reached home she found Mrs. Fletcher there, waiting her return.

"Well, Belle, back again from your hospital walking? Really you are a dear creature to go and talk to the poor people."

"I've been rewarded to-day," replied Belle; "I met with a man from Farehurst who knew Tom and Miss Thorne."

"Tell me all about it," said Carrie; "I came up to-day on purpose to know how you and your lover are getting on after your little quarrel the last time I was here. Of course you did have a little quarrel?"

Belle gave a full account of the whole affair, concluding by saying that she thought she had been much too hard on Tom, and that she was going to write to him to make it up.

"Very well, Belle, though if I were you I should wait for him to make the first move. Where is he now?"

Belle hesitated.

"I think he is in London."

"Don't you know?"

"Only indirectly. I thought from what he said that he was going back to Farehurst."

"Hem!" coughed Mrs. Fletcher, whose married life had not been of a sort to induce confidence in the male sex. "Let me see, that man in the hospital said that Miss Thorne was engaged to some one in London?"

"Yes," faltered Belle.

"And Mr. Kendal did not tell you a week ago that she was engaged, a thing which he would have been sure to do if she had been, as it would have cleared himself. So she has become engaged to someone in town during the last week. Can you put two and two together, Belle?"

Belle rose indignantly and left the room.

"Poor child, I've made her angry," soliloquised Mrs. Fletcher. "But when she knows as much about men as I do, she'll be quite ready to believe the worst that is said of them; in fact, the worse a rumour is the more likely it is to be true."

CHAPTER III.

It was a glad morning for Kendal when Dr. Farebrother pronounced him well. To get the bandages off his head; to have a clean shave; to eat a good breakfast, seeing for himself what he put into his mouth; all these were absolute luxuries.

It is needless to remark that he determined to pay a visit to Belle that very day. He could not make out at all how it was that she had never written to him; the best reason he could imagine was that she was piqued at his not writing and had resolved not to be the first to do so. But strong in the knowledge that he had a good case, he made his call without any anxiety as to its result.

Belle was in, and alone. Their greeting was as lovers' greetings should be. As if by tacit agreement they had apparently forgotten their misunderstanding. But when the first few minutes had passed, it was clear that Belle still remembered it.

"You see I'm up in town again," said Kendal, "and I haven't given you notice this time either."

"Why do you say 'up in town again'?" asked Belle.

Kendal gave a slight start; he was afraid for a moment that she had discovered all.

"Why shouldn't I say so?" he enquired.

"Have you been out of London since I last saw you?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Belle, I haven't."

"Yes, tell the truth, please."

"But if it comes to mutual recriminations," said Kendal, "how is it that you haven't written a word to me all this time?"

"How was I to know your address?"

"My letters were forwarded from Farehurst."

"Why did you conceal your town address from me?" asked Belle. "Why did you not come here to see me, or write, at least?"

"I couldn't."

"Couldn't! What do you mean?"

"Simply that I was unable."

"Are you not going to tell me the reason?"

"I may do so when you are in a more suitable frame of mind for hearing it."

"Am I not in the right mood now?"

"No. You seem to have readopted the tone which you used when we last met, and until we can talk more as we used to do, I don't think it's my duty to make any avowals. I object to using the apologetic style."

Belle looked rather annoyed for a moment, then with a smile she said: "Well, Tom, I think we each owe the other an apology, and as you won't begin, I will. I've met someone since I saw you who knows you and Miss Thorne."

"And he or she has disabused your mind of your unfounded ideas about us?"

"Partly, at all events. I heard that Miss Thorne is engaged."

"Yes, I know."

"For a moment, or perhaps a good deal longer than that, I thought that it might be to you, or rather I thought it just possible. Someone put it into my head, and your silence, and your staying in town without coming to see me, looked so odd. But directly I saw you come into the room just now, I knew that that couldn't be true."

"You are quite right; it isn't."

"Now I've made my explanation. You were in the wrong when we last met, and I resolved you should be the first to acknowledge it. You have done so partly by coming here, but now you must tell me everything; make a clean breast of it."

"H'm! I don't know," replied Kendal.

"When a girl goes so far as to think her lover capable of becoming engaged to another girl without mentioning the trifling

fact, I am doubtful whether she can claim any explanation. How did you know I was in town?"

"I'll tell you everything. Your brother said so in a letter to my brother."

"And how did you learn about Miss Thorne's engagement?"

"I happened to visit a poor fellow in hospital who came from Farehurst."

"And you pumped him about me, of course?"

"I asked him a few questions."

"Do you call that justifiable conduct?" asked Tom. "Never mind; I suppose every woman would do it, whatever she thought about it. Now I'll make my confession. You know my eyes have been out of order lately?"

"Yes; but they were not very bad, were they?"

"Yes, they were; but I didn't care to bother anyone about it, so I came up to undergo an operation. Dr. Farebrother performed it, and for the last week or so I've been lying in darkness, waiting to hear his verdict as to whether I was cured or blind for life. So you see that I could not write or come to see you very well, could I?"

"Oh, Tom, why didn't you tell me, and let me come and nurse you? I'll never forgive you!"

"But if I had become blind I should never have——"

"Stop, Tom; don't say anything so awful. I am so sorry I've been so angry with you; but how could I know?"

"How could I know either?" asked Kendal. "How could I tell that my wretched little brother was writing to yours? I thought all the time that you were piqued at my not writing. I never thought that you were seriously offended. I expected from day to day to hear from you and find a flower in the envelope as a token of forgiveness."

"Don't say any more, Tom."

Kendal obeyed for a few moments, employing the interval in a pleasanter manner.

"By-the-bye, Belle," he then said, "do you know the name of the person who told you about me?"

"Stokes. He said you would know him."

"Oh yes; a fine young fellow. I heard something about his coming to London."

"He was a very civil young man. He seemed a little superior to the ordinary

clodhopper, though he talked with a tremendous accent."

"Yes; he was born at Farehurst, and has lived there all his life."

Kendal was immensely amused to find that Belle had still no idea of the identity of Stokes. But it was time to play his final card; they might be interrupted at any moment.

"Belle," he said tenderly, "do you remember refusing to give me a flower when I asked?"

"Don't talk of that, please."

"I won't, if you will give me one now as a token of forgiveness."

"Oh, Tom, I am so very sorry; there isn't a flower in the house."

Kendal rose and walked to the window, where he stood whistling with his hands in his pockets.

In a few moments he felt Belle's arm slipped through his.

"You don't think that's only an excuse, Tom?" she said.

"I don't know, I'm sure; I only know you can give flowers away to other fellows."

"What do you mean?"

"Not that I want your flowers," went on Tom; "when you saw me last time, and gave me one, I——"

"Gave you one last time I saw you?" cried Belle. "I don't understand."

"Yes, you did," returned Tom; "what do you call this?"

He produced from his pocket the identical Christmas rose which she had given to Stokes in the hospital; there it was, broken petal and all.

"I told you I should keep it for many a day," said Tom in reply to her wondering look, "and so I shall. You gave me a token of forgiveness you see, ever so long ago."

"And you were Stokes?" asked Belle, "and it was you who told me what a fine fellow you were, and how lucky I was to get you?"

"And it was you who gave away flowers to fine young fellows whom you didn't know?" laughed Tom. "Yes, it was, and you were an angel who came unawares to my bedside, and gave me the first pleasant half-hour I had spent in that dreary hospital."

"I ought not to forgive you for all this," said Belle, "you took a mean advantage of me. But——"

"But what, my darling?"

"You can keep the Christmas rose if you like."

GEOFFREY STIRLING.

BY MRS. LEITH ADAMS.

PART II.

CHAPTER V. HAUNTED.

WHEN first the news became known that "Maister Geoffrey" had become the owner of Dale End, great was the stir and excitement in Becklington.

"If oi were yo'," said a crafty neighbour to Jeremy Bindwhistle (long since deposed from his post of head man at the White House), "oi'd go oop t' Maister Geoffrey and tell 'un as owd hands should have t' fust chance. Happen he'll set yo' ahead o' the lot o' gardeners as he'll gather about him—nay, happen yo' moight get such promotion, i' toime, as for to droive yer missis to church and market i' a spring-cart. I've heerd tell on head-gardeners' comin' to such-like upliftins—aye, that have I!"

"Ketch a weasel asleep wi' his tail a-fire," replied Jeremy, winking a slow and laborious wink, and moistening his hands in a homely and primitive fashion, as though he were already preparing to handle the reins of the spring-cart in question. "I'm wick, neighbour, and t' missis is fettling my Sunday-go-to-meetin' waistcoat, for to give me a countenance afore t' quality, and boldness o' tongue to spake oop strong and hearty i' my own proper person."

So Jeremy, in his own proper person, spoke up to some purpose, and shortly afterwards found himself not only head-gardener at Dale End, but the tenant of the lodge at the big gates, and as prosperous a fellow, take it altogether, as might be seen in a day's march.

No one in Becklington grudged Jeremy—or "Maister Bindwhistle," as he began to be styled—this success in life; and in truth he was a very different man nowadays to the somewhat lazy individual who let the flowers in the White House garden "mak' posies o' their-selves" at their own sweet will. A sense of greatness and responsibility oftentimes begets energy. It had done so in the case of Mr. Bindwhistle. The subordinates he commanded were ruled with an iron hand. Idleness or neglect meant instant dismissal. When Mrs. Devenant returned to Becklington—under altered circumstances such as entitled her to the consideration of persons of discernment—Jeremy now and again stepped down to see her, looked with a critical eye at the flower-beds over

which he once had reigned, and altogether demeaned himself as though no tiniest plant therein, no microscopic weed, had, in those bygone days, been able to elude his vigilance. Also as if he rather thought the "boy" who "minded" Mrs. Devenant's garden was a shirk and a deceiver, and required the sharpest looking after.

That Jeremy talked of landscape gardening as though he had been born and bred to that extended form of business; that he sketchily laid out all the surrounding county, and more besides, as he sat enthroned on the high-backed bench beside Farmer Dale at The Safe Retreat, are things that may be taken for granted. We most of us find our ideas expand with our opportunities, and are inclined at last to yield to the pleasing delusion that they have never revolved in any narrower sphere.

And in truth Jeremy might be pardoned for taking some pride in those lovely terraced walks, those stretches of emerald turf, with here and there noble groups of trees casting soft shadows of waving branch and bough, sylvan haunts where once little Hilda tripped by Miss Alicia's side, and, in a later day, Cuthbert Deane dreamed of the woman who was now his happy wife.

Nigh upon eight years had now gone by since Jeremy had moved himself, his family, and his goods and chattels, into the lodge at Dale End gates. His companions at The Safe Retreat had, therefore, grown used to a certain pomposity upon his part, that no man took ill, since it was a manner to be looked for in those who sit in high places. Jeremy, like Farmer Dale, had grown stout with years; more florid, too, than of yore; and steadily addicted to waistcoats of violent tints and vivid contrasts.

It was, therefore, a startling thing for the worthies assembled in the bar of The Safe Retreat one Saturday night in the early autumn of the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight, to see the said Jeremy enter the portals of that cosy haven with listless shuffling gait, pallid face, and downcast look. He nodded to the assembly in general as he took his accustomed place by Farmer Dale, and the assembly nodded to him. One or two breathed hard, but no one spoke until Jeremy began filling his pipe with mechanical fingers, that held no tobacco; ramming down nothing with busy little finger, and staring oddly at the fire.

"Whatever's ado, mon?" cried Farmer Dale, slapping his neighbour on the knee;

"has thy missis been thrappin' at thee about summat? Whatever's come over thee, Jeremy?"

For all answer Jeremy drew a long breath, giving a furtive glance first at the unlatched door and then at the close-curtained window.

Jake got up and closed the door. Serious business was evidently impending, and eavesdroppers must be guarded against.

Fortunately no strangers were present, therefore Bindwhistle might be encouraged to speak out.

"There's a heaviness over thee, lad," said the farmer, again striving to rally the meditative gardener; "What's t' meanin' on 't'?"

"There's no heaviness about me," said Jeremy, speaking sullenly, and still absently filling his pipe with nothing, "but what's becomin' in one as has seen the living sperrit o' a dead mon."

Each man present projected his head towards the speaker.

"A sperrit!" said they, all speaking at once, while Softie quickly buttoned his shabby coat across his breast, as though to panoply himself in the armour nearest at hand without loss of time.

"Well, a ghost, if so be yo' loike that better," quoth Jeremy.

"Did it say aught to ye?" asked one.

"What shape did it tak'?" cried another.

"What were it loike?" exclaimed a third.

"Wheer wur it goin' to?" put in Softie.

"How con I tell my story if a' yo' fellys speak at onct?" said Jeremy irritably.

Then he let his pipe fall from the shaking hands which could no longer hold it, making no comment and no lament when it lay shivered to pieces upon the red bricks of the floor.

"Ay, but it were a fearsome sight!"

At this they gathered closer round him still. They might have been bees and he their queen, so eagerly did they cluster about him, Softie, meanwhile, edging a little away from the window, as uncertain whether a ghostly hand might not presently draw aside the curtain and have him by the ear.

"It wur creepin' along nigh the big rho'dendrun tree when first I see'd it," said Jeremy, speaking in a sepulchral voice, as became the theme. "It came upon me wi' a glimmer o' light, so to speak—a somethin' a' i' white. I'd called to moind some young plants I had i' a frame, and lef' open, not thinkin' there be a bit of a frost, and it wur late; it chimed twelve

from the tower just as I ketched the glimmer as I spoke on before. If I had na' stepped out of the way, the thing would ha' run up agen me. It come right at me——"

Softie turned up the collar of his coat, and put his hands in his pockets. Every possible protection was called for at such a crisis.

"What did it look loike, when it come close?" put in the constable, whom the generosity of a new-fangled town corporation retained in his old office; "was it folded i' a sheet lengthwise? That's the fashion o' them, one and all."

"No, it weren't," said Jeremy, aggrieved that his ghost did not answer to the approved pattern.

"Why, lad," chimed in the farmer, in high glee, "this sperrit o' thine ain't nothing no better than Softie's here—time he coome in wi' a face like milk and 's eyes startin' fra' 's yed, and told us how he'd seen a boggart wi' three legs, and how it made up to him, belchin' out hot burnin' brimstone i' 's face. Don't be shamefaced over the thing, Softie," went on the jolly old fellow; "what if thy boggart wur but Sally Hurdle's cow wi' three white legs an' a black 'un, and she stuck i' a bog and blowin' hard through fear? The wickest of us is took in at times, and a black leg won't show on a shadowy night, tho' white ones may."

Jeremy treated this narrative with contempt, rolling a bit of broken pipe-stem about with his foot, and staring hard at the fire.

"If thy ghost weren't wrapped i' a windin'-sheet, what were it clothed upon wi', Maister Bindwhistle?" said Matthew Hawthorne, when the laugh against Softie had subsided.

"Wi' a waggoner's frock down to 's heels. It had a red beard, an' t' yure on its yed come down to its eyes. Its hands wur hanging down at its soides, and the fingers wur workin' same as Billy Hurdle's when he's i' the fits. It made as tho' it wur bearin' a heavy burden—stoopin' and creepin'-like, and groanin' as it went."

"But how did yo' know it for a sperrit?" put in the constable. Accustomed to question prisoners, he went to the root of the matter at once.

"Because it had the face of a dead mon," said Jeremy; "because its eyes were the eyes of a dead mon—same as Gabriel Devenant's, time as his missis pult him out o' t' big dyke."

At this, even the farmer began to think the night was more chilly than he had imagined; while, as for Softie, he was busy meditating what possible bribe he could offer the constable to induce him to see him as far as his own door.

"It must have come very nigh for yo' to see it so plain," said the farmer.

"Yo' may say that," answered Jeremy with a long sighing breath; "it looked clean through me and out at the other side o' me. I tell yo' I felt like a pane o' glass."

"Were yo' feert, lad?" said the farmer.

"Not I!" said Jeremy stoutly; "it 'ud ill become one as is set up on high——"

But the farmer did not let him finish his sentence.

"What did'st thee do, lad?"

"Oh, I was nearer t' big house than my own, so I hastened my footsteps——"

"Yo' took to your heels, like a man!" shouted the farmer; "same as t' rest on us would ha' done—that's about it, lad!"

"Well, I thought I'd make sure as no one at the Dale had seen the sight as Heaven had predestinated to me. 'For,' says I to myself, 'if Mrs. Geoffrey, and she so weak, and frail, and ailing more than mostly this while past, were to hear of such-like company creeping among the trees, she'd be skeered to death.'"

"But they'd all be abed at the Dale at that hour o' the night," said the farmer, with a shrewd glance.

"Ay, so they wur; but I couldna' tell if that might be so——"

"Didst come back t' same way?" put in Jake.

"No," said Jeremy, "I'd told one o' the lads to wrap a bit o' matting about some o' the young plants, so I went t' other way home—to see if he'd done it."

"Well, it's a rum hearin' this, and no mistake," said Matthew; "an' I hope no word of it may get to Mrs. Geoffrey, since ghostly fear is bad for the sick, and apt to be aguish."

"Well," said Jeremy, turning upon him almost fiercely; "I've kep' it all to mysel' this week past, tho' it's gone as bad wi' me as heavy victuals, and giv' me the shivers i' my insoide past all belief; so dunna be thrappin' at me like as if I was a sieve, and couldn't hold nothin'."

"We'd best all keep it to oursels," said the farmer, tolerant of Jeremy's pettishness, as one who felt that a man privileged to see ghosts must be tenderly handled;

"for, as Maister Bindwhistle says, it might fright Mrs. Geoffrey, and she's bad enoo' wi'out that."

"It seems to me," said Jake reflectively, rubbing his chin, "that the young heir is too much away. It's here to-day, and gone to-morrow, wi' Maister Ralph; and half the sunshine seems to go out o' the old market-place when he never comes ridin' through on his black pony, an' cryin' out, 'Jake, Jake, I say! how's trade this mornin'?"

"It's ill work for the likes of us to set oursels up to judge our betters," said Matthew, "and far be such from me; but I've oftentimes said to mysel', if I'd a lad o' my own like Maister Ralph, I'd never breath free-like when he was out o' my sight."

"Taint want o' love, Lord knows, as drives the squire to send Maister Ralph continual to foreign lands. Why, I've seen a light shine out o' his eyes when he's lookin' at that boy, as 'ud go far to bring the tears to one's own," said Jeremy, speaking as one with authority. "And yet he conna' rest to let t' lad bide home; it's eddication as he's drivin' at—that's what t' squire's oop to. Why, I've heard tell as Maister Ralph can speak in as many tongues as there's fingers on a man's hand, that have I!"

At this there was a general exclamation of amazement. Diversity of tongues was not as common a gift in those days as now, and to the rustic mind such knowledge was something alarming.

"Yo' say well, Jake," continued Jeremy, pleased with the impression he had made, "that Maister Ralph is like sunshine i' the place. When he comes oop to me, wi' his laughin' eyes an' his merry smile, and 'Jeremy,' says he, 'give me a bonnie one to set i' my boozum, I'm ready to cut the choicest flower o' the lot. Ay, if I'd none but it, and was never to have another!"

"Wherever's the lad got to now?" said the farmer, taking an immense pull at his pipe, and exhaling a corresponding cloud through his nose.

"Lord knows!" said Jeremy. "It's at th' other side the world, I verily do believe; so far away you can't make out the name on't. And I wish he was home, for there's times when I don't like the looks on t' squire."

"Nor me neither," said Farmer Dale, shaking his head. "He's nobbut a man i' the prime o' life—something about fifty-five, or thereabouts, I reckon, and he

looks more like seventy. He seemed to grow old-like all at once, and he's got a restless way wi' him—a troubled-like way. Then see how he's lost flesh! why, you could count the bones i' his hands; and when he grips yo', it's a kindly enoo grip (what else should it be, being his'n?) but cold to the feel, same as one as is gradely sick. I dunnot like t' looks on t' squire no better than yo' do, Maister Bindwhistle, and yet he's bin as lucky a man—luckier than ony that stands i' Becklington this day! Who'd have thought ten years ago as Maister Geoffrey would be squire o' Dale End?"

"Or, t' ould squire and his son both dead and buried, and Miss Alicia married to our vicar?" continued Matthew.

"Yet I mind," said Jake, putting his head on one side, and looking unspeakably wise, "that the night afore it were known as them two were to be wed, I'd a candle wi' two wicks, that had I, and the voice within me seemed to say, 'Jake, my brave chap, yo'll hear a tale o' wedded love come mornin'—which I did," added Jake with the air of a prophet whose predictions had been fulfilled.

"Ay, yo may call it wedded love too," said the farmer, "there's some as weds and don't love, and some—more's the pity—as loves and don't wed, but them two is set afore the rest on us for a foreshadowin' of what a pleasant place this world may be for them as does both things wi' a' their might, and loves to help others to happiness just because they've got such a heap on it themselves. I mind when Miss Alicia was the sorrowfulest lookin' woman yo' could see, and I doant say but what the shadow of it all is on her yet, and ever will be—but it's a shadow wi' the sun shinin' through it, for all that."

This was very interesting, and highly gratifying to the hearers, but the conclave presently drifted once more towards the subject of the ghost in the Dale End shrubbery, and Softie resolved that, at any cost, he must get the constable to see him home that night.

Though Jeremy, after this, kept a pretty strict watch for the ghost each Sunday night that he chanced to be abroad at a late hour, no apparition appeared; and so time passed. Autumn deepened every russet and golden tint in the woods, turned the bracken red and yellow, and gave the earwigs plenty of beautiful houses to live in, in the shape

of daintily folded dahlia flowers—gold and crimson, white and mottled.

At last came a Sunday upon which a friendly quartette—Jeremy, Jake, and Matthew Hawthorne, with poor Softie thrown in as a sort of make-weight, paid a visit to Farmer Dale and his ruddy-cheeked Nancy.

What with tobacco, beer, and chat, time passed quickly, and midnight was not far off when the party broke up, while, even then, the jolly farmer insisted upon seeing his guests part way home.

Be it fully understood that each and all of the five men were in a condition "to walk the plank," as Matthew grimly put it; in other words, to cross the brook at the bottom of Mrs. Dale's garden in perfect safety. If one betrayed the slightest possible inclination to waver and was glad of a hand slipped beneath his elbow from behind, that one was Softie.

The night had changed, during that pleasant time they had spent in the cosy farmhouse parlour, from fair to foul.

It was a night of clouds hurrying across the sky; of wet leaves, dank from late rain, shining in the pallid sickly light of a moon obscured by a moving veil of mist; a night full of flitting shadows, of whispers among the branches overhead; a night eerie, wild, changeful, yet warm as a night in summer.

Good liquor, and not too much of it, warms the heart without muddling the head.

Jake's heart was warmed so that he sang as he walked, somewhat ahead of the rest, sang stoutly of glory to come and of foes abased.

"My foes Thy footstool Thou shalt make
And from their necks the stiffness take,
While I on glory full of pride—"

Bless us all this night and keep us! Look ye there!"

"There" was a gleam of something white among the trees that skirted the Dale End property, and even as Jake gasped forth that unpremeditated amendment to his hymn, it came nearer—grew more and more defined—a slowly-moving figure clothed in white.

"I forgot we'd got to pass by t' squire's, or I'd never have come," moaned Softie, whose legs shook under him.

Slowly on and on came the figure, the fitful light now touching it, now leaving it in shadow, now touching it again.

It must be conceded that Jake made a struggle to be as brave as his song. He

planted his spindle legs far apart, as who should say: "They mayn't be much to boast of, but they're the best foundation Nature has bestowed upon me, and upon them I take my stand."

But even the spindles wavered as that creeping figure came near the high fence that separated the lane from the woodland, and, as the figure passed close, the men huddled up together in a heap, for the face they looked upon was the face of a dead man, and the widely-opened eyes, on which the moon just then gleamed brightly, were a dead man's eyes—unseeing, glassy, terrible in their immobility.

The ghastly thing, in clinging waggoner's frock, with unkempt red locks coming low on the brow, and crowned by a low wide-brimmed hat, had vanished—died out of sight among a group of clustering trees, and a faint moaning sound as of a thing in mortal pain was borne upon the wind to awestruck ears.

"What did I tell yo'?" gasped Jeremy, who stood grasping his hair with his hands, while his hat lay in the rut; "didna' I tell yo' it wur bent under a burden? Did yo' see t' hands gropin' at summat as bowed its back, and workin' like Bill's when he's took wi' the fits? I wish I wur whoam."

May be they all did.

"Why wherever's Softie got to?" cried the farmer, glad, no doubt, of the thoroughly human sound of his own voice.

Softie was seated in the ditch at the opposite side of the road, crying bitterly, and wiping his eyes and nose on the sleeve of his jacket. It was no easy job either to drag him from his lair, since as soon as he was set upon his feet he flung himself down again; but, upon the farmer suggesting that they should all go home and leave him to interview the ghost alone, he took a more practical view of matters, and was led the rest of the way home by the chief constable, as if he were a prisoner newly captured by the arm of the law.

The men were very silent as they went

their way. The memory of that ghastly face, those fixed and sightless eyes, was a thing that clung to the mind like a burr. It was a thing that could not be shaken off even by the bravest.

They got Softie home; and it is to be feared his better-half cruelly misconstrued his trembling and prostrate condition; but as she flung to the door in Farmer Dale's face, and refused to hear a word of explanation, everyone was powerless, and the last thing his companions heard of Softie was the fresh outburst of weeping with which he began to narrate what his wife was pleased to term a "pack o' danged lies."

Jeremy had been left at the lodge-gates.

There remained therefore only the farmer (whose solitary walk home did not appear to cause him much apprehension), Matthew, and Jake the cobbler.

"I reckon I've hit the right nail on the head," said the farmer gravely, before he bade the other two good-night; "Yon's the man as robbed t' bank—donnot yo' mind how they said as he'd carrotty locks an' a carter's smock—eh? He's dead and buried be who he may, but t' weary load o' sin upon his soul wunna let him rest."

Here the speaker paused a moment, overcome by the strange and awful experiences of that Sabbath night.

"I reckon yo're about reet, farmer," said Jake after a moment's deep reflection. "I reckon yon's him, as ye' say. But what dangs me is this: why should he tak' to wanderin' round by Squire Dale's place, of a' places on the wide earth?"

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